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The Beggar's Vision

Brooks More

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

BY

BROOKES MORE

AUTHOR OF

"THE LOVER'S ROSARY" "SONGS OF A RED CROSS NURSE"

Illustrated by

TRACY PORTER RUDD

With an Introduction by

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE

THE CORNHILL PUBLISHING COMPANY

BOSTON, U. S. A.

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AT BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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TO KATHARINE—
PLEDGE OF MY LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

"The Mystic Seven"

IN the explanatory note which prefaces the final poem in this book, "The Land of Light", Mr. More makes the statement that "Seventy stanzas are in the narrative", but his thought, impregnated with symbols, leaps over the semicolon to add "and there is a mystery of perfection contained in the number seventy, it being ten times the perfect seven".

There are seven narratives in this book of Mr. More's, the "perfect seven", to which is attached an element of that mystery, interwoven symbolically, which is associated with the mystery of numbers. The numbers signify, because the meaning in every one of these poems has an exit upon thought that is only reached through corridors mirrored with a subtle and alluring radiance of expression. There is at the core of it all a philosophy of idealism. I mean that all the narratives together make a kind of common source which take diverse directions through the imagination, like branching streams. I might put it another way, more directly, and say that the poet has idealized the religious mood, rather perhaps, idealized religion as the deepest human need, and made it manifest through the various conceptions of it among mankind. Now to do this in poetry that makes no compromise with pulpit morals, with nothing that diminishes the sense of the proper balance between the imagination and its sub-

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stance, between the vision and its symbol, is to achieve a kind of poetic originality that is distinctive. These poems of Mr. More's have this distinction.

From what I think contains the central idea of these poems, and fine, it seems, for the complete blending of substance and expression, though there are in some of the others passages of a higher quality of verbal imagery and subtler music — from "Sinners All —" I quote the last three stanzas, the first of which closes with the speech of Timour Lenk:

"The Brahmin priesthood cursed my life and death;
The Roman Pontiff banned me to unrest; —
Yet here I've wandered as the winter's breath,
No sadder than the saints whom they have blest."

So the bad ghost of Timour Lenk proclaimed
The weak futility of church and saint;
And as he finished many more exclaimed
Strong approbation in weird accents faint.

And all the while this offspring of the tomb
Thus whispered, they were 'neath Saint Peter's Dome,
Where Pope and Cardinals in that sacred room,
Conferred for glory and success of Rome.

Here, I think, one gets the key of the conceptive unity in these narratives. In this poem "Sinners All —", the ghosts of the adherents of many faiths, from the Crusader of the Holy Wars to the Hindu and Mohammedan, come uneasily back to tell the world, a world much as they had left it in

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aspiration and conflict for the true way, of their faithful disciple-ship. Now, the other poems, as it were, grow out of this fundamental idea as distinct and separate symbols of different creeds. All, however, prefaced by the opening poem "The Beggar's Vision", which is typified as humanity lifting its soul from the trammels of impeding earthly experience, towards the light of the immortal goal. The figure in "The Beggar's Vision" has another aspect as well. That side is the passive acquiescence to the external laws of nature. Man will always drift toward a crisis; it is the crisis that precipitates his character of conduct. In consequence, religion mixes very little with the externals of human life; it is nature alone that re-acts upon them. But ever just beneath the surface of human consciousness the reflexes of remote religious traditions in the blood are eternally on protective guard to meet and combat the external influences accompanying every crisis. "The Beggar's Vision" condenses this immense array of moods, and the poet, with a deft imagination, leaves the solution open to each man's care.

With "The Beggar's Vision" in mind it is of importance to note, in grasping the absolute unity of these narratives to mention here, the last poem in this book, "The Land of Light", which is a beautiful allegory of the search and finding of Hope and Truth, which are the ultimate attainments of "The Beggar's Vision" perfected through the moods of the intervening poems.

What I have so far said is the mere clue to the substance that Mr. More weaves into the details of the poems themselves. In these details the matter is more complicated when you stop to consider the elements out of which he

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makes his narratives. The narrative of "The Convent Legend" may seem on acquaintance but a mere picture, richly but coolly coloured, with its tragic interest; but there is far more than that, for the glow of ecstasy, unearthly and divine, of a Church's doctrine is made sensible in the figure of the dying nun, and the attitude of the convent towards her death. So in "The Last of Lost Eden", the symbol of perfection made at the beginning still exists hidden in the world where man will one day find it through the perfection of self, the soul. In "Orpheus and Eurydice", the poet turns to the pagan world for his symbol and through the sweet memories of the elegiac myth, saturates the very thought and experience of religion with its most vital and dominant force — Love.

The wearied centuries have withered away
    The essence of his youth and left him old —
He seems a shadow in the noon of day,
    A wraith of pale mist when the moon is cold.

Weary of heart the Golden Age he mourns,
    In winter winds attuned to minor keys;
And when the gladdened earth warm spring adorns
    The birds rehearse his plaintive melodies. —

And who is he whose song is sad and sweet?
    And who is he that sings a mournful song?
And who is he with slow but viewless feet,
    That treads the swaying asphodels among?

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Isn't Orpheus the very type of perfection, the ideal embodiment of the love whose substance is filled with spiritual elements? Note the analogy suggested by the poet in his conception of Love as the supreme attainment of human striving. The sad Orpheus mourns in the weariness of his heart, overburdened with memories of his lost Eurydice, for the Golden Age. Now, the Founder of Christianity, was also a "Man of Sorrows", and He, too, set Love as the perfection to be attained by man whereby he was to inherit that Heaven of His Father's where a Golden Age existed of perpetual duration.

One sees at once that Mr. More's vision in the poems bridges *religions* Christian and Pagan across which Love travels from race to race, from era to era, now in the guise of a Virtue, now in the guise of a Moral Grace, but always in the same body and substance, and eternally with the same glowing countenance.

I might here appropriately quote a remark dropped by the author in an interview which reveals the serious ideals and high purposes of these poems. The statement will show to the reader that Mr. More's conception of the poet's function is the same as that of those mighty bards of old who were the teachers and the counsellors of mankind, and not mere weavers of bizarre and decorative fancies. The poet is the true maker of high imaginings, of the mysteries and wonders of life. "In this cycle of seven religio-psycho-philosophico-narrative poems", he is reported to have said, "may be found one which pleads a knowledge of Christian Mythology, pertaining to the Garden of Eden — which was promised, unchanged and preserved in all its pristine beauty to the

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saved issue of Adam and Eve, and to be given to them as the inheritance of a distant millennium; and some inkling of Chaldean and Arabian Mythology may be useful when reading 'The Land of Light'. But how can I guarantee the Grecian Myth, 'Orpheus and Eurydice' — bedevilled by the serpent in the Golden Age, may foreshadow, or parallel, the true history of Adam and Eve and the Serpent in the Age of Innocence?"

The "guarantee" of the parallelism of the symbolical unity of life, love and religion, one may find in the narratives themselves. They will be discussed for their thought and substance, and equally enjoyed and admired for a rich and varied poetic expression.

WILLIAM STANLEY BRAITHWAITE.

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

There is a path that wanders through the hills,
In spring made beautiful with babbling rills
That follow it like gold beneath the sun,
Or turn to silver when the day is done:
But in the winter it is bleak and bare, —
The coldest winds are even colder there:
Nursed in the gorges of a mountain chain,
Like Furies they gather the sleet and rain;
And huge clouds hurtling over that lone path
Destroy its loveliness with wreck and wrath —
God sain me those who chance to pass that way,
To brave such storms when evening turneth gray!

It happened on a night of storm and hail,
And rain and sleet — an early winter gale,
Bitter and blighting after autumn's breath,
Cutting the bones with edge as keen as death. —
No cheerful ray could pierce the gloomy clouds;
The silent stars were wrapped in silent shrouds;
And, save the whirling splash of hail and rain, —
And save the sad wind, — as a god in pain, —
A silence awful, terrible and vast,
Made Nature voiceless in the wintry blast: —

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The cock forgot to cheer his drooping hens,
The owls were moping in their leafy dens,
The moonstruck frog forgot to gloat and sing,
The droning beetle shut his painted wing,
The tuneful insects of orchestral night
Had hushed their bands in universal fright. —
God help the homeless, pity the distressed,
The wretch forlorn who hath not where to rest!

In that lone pathway on that bitter night,
A vagrant plodded, in a sorry plight,
Struggling with winds and splashing through the mire,
Seeking to ease the pangs of his desire;
Food, warmth and shelter from the sleet and rain:
But ever as he went he sought in vain
Through devious ways that wandered without end,
Until discouraged he refused to bend
His steps to right or left, but tried to go
Straight on his journey, till the dawn might show
A gladder prospect. Meanwhile through the dark
He saw a glimmer or a fitful spark
That flashed a welcome o'er the watery waste. —

With what new hope the wretch begins to haste,
Rejoicing as he sees that cheerful light —
Surely the signal of a fireside bright; —
But when he tries to open the closed gate
A mastiff watchdog, as the hinges grate,

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Leaps out to rend the thief of his domain:
Sadly the beggar turns to brave the rain,
Choosing the cold wind and his hunger pangs
As sweeter comforts than the mastiff's fangs! —
So he resumes his endless weary way,
And prays the dawn to herald a fair day. —

What weary hours the famished traveler passed,
And how he deemed each hour would prove his last,
What bitter musings filled his fevered brain,
And how he sighed for youth and hope again;
These and all sad things we could wish a-mort,
And wing our fancy to some kingly court,
Where wit and beauty wreathe congenial smiles,
And the soft glance the slipping hour beguiles.
But life is sterner than a man would frame
Were he to steal his own Creator's name:
Though youth may doubt it, there's a hard word,
"Fail" —
But there is mercy where the cynics rail. —
Ay, there is beauty in disease and death
If ye could fathom what old Ocean saith,
Who chases old age with his wrinkling tide
And carves his gems where multitudes have died;
If ye could listen to the laboured Earth,
Whose patient thrift saves everything of worth;
She holds the dead leaves in the ugly mire,

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And when Spring calls they rise in new attire —
Violets, roses, lilies, all that's gay,
Are deftly fashioned from the leaves' decay.

Now when our tattered vagrant, almost dead,
Believed the last word of his life was said,
Behold the rosy Dawn, herald of days,
Tinted the sky with gold and crimson rays;
And the dun clouds, that envy joy and light,
Sullenly flitted in the deeps of night;
And ere the sun-car rolled with snorting four
From flaming stalls, the rain had ceased to pour.
Fair on the right a meadow rose to view
With gentle slope, and winter's russet hue
Showed where the sickled hay had lately grown;
This had been gathered all and neatly thrown
In shapely ricks to weather storm and gale.

Forlorn and weary while his weak knees fail,
The traveler leaves the wet and muddy way,
Reaches at last the nearest mound of hay,
And finds warm shelter from the frosty breeze. —
Soon, in the languor of sweet slumber's ease,
His woes are melted into roseate joys.
Lulled in smooth dreams he romps with jolly boys,
Or counteth up his golden argosies:
Such happy visions dance before his eyes, —

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Joys of his youth, of manhood, of old age;
For even if old he deems he is a sage,
And motley multitudes to his address
Gather for wisdom in a mighty press.

Flattered to tears in alchemy of dreams,
His tears of joy were turned to sadder streams.
Yet even when his visions had been turned
To things more real, he was unconcerned;
For though a beggar he, and rather old,
He was a royal tramp and loved not gold.
Full of this whim he turned and heaved a sigh,
And never dreamed 'twas time for him to die:
Yet so 'twas written in the scroll of fate:
And death was kind — he died in royal state —
There he smiled grandly in bespattered rags,
Lord of all beggars — so the sad world wags.

His hour of death had scarcely passed away,
Two farmers found him on his bed of hay;
And when they knew the homeless wretch was dead,
They tenderly raised his gray and rugged head.
They searched his tattered garments hoping there
To find some token of his loving care.
Naught could they find of pelf or hidden gold,
But only a paper wrapped in careful fold;
And these few words were writ in letters bold,
In smooth-made letters of a clerkly hand: —

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"Kind strangers when your curious eyes have scanned
This meager testament of one well dead,
Beseech you, know his solemn will is said. —

"My name is Nameless, and ye need not know
The whence I came from and the where I go.
I give my all, my body, to the Earth;
She is my mother for she gave me birth:
Out of her loam my body first was made,
Into her dust my careworn frame will fade.
And, as I think of it, there's no regret;
My scattered remnants will sweet children get.
This is the pledge of life, it never dies;
From dead corrupt the sweetest flowers arise.
The hour will come when the atoms of this clay
Will walk new-fashioned in the glorious day.
Though long my footsteps stumbled in the mire,
To other ways my life will yet aspire."

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THE CONVENT LEGEND

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THE CONVENT LEGEND

Sheltered by massive cloister walls,
(Where holy men abide)
While deeply fell December snows
On the steep mountain side,
This legend of a convent old
We read one Christmas tide.—

'Tis Christmas Eve, and all is still
And darker it is growing—
Far from the north on icy wing
A bitter wind is blowing—
A colder night was never known,
Cold, bitter cold, and snowing.

Forth from her cell a pale nun fares,
From cell to chapel door,
And as she goes through drifting snows,
Her beads she telleth o'er;
She tells her beads a hundred times—
A hundred times and more.

She stands before the chapel door,
So faint and numb with cold,
She trembles as the frosted leaves,
When the year is turning old;
But there she waiteth in the snow
Until her beads are told.

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She tries to enter — "Mary save!"
The chapel door is fast,
A massive door, and she so weak
From days of penance past —
Ah, surely she must perish there! —
But now the wintry blast,

Blowing so cold o'er hill and wold,
(A bitter Christmas tide!)
As if it heard the holy word,
When she to Mary cried,
Struck on the door with sudden strength
And pushed it open wide.

And as the massive door gave way,
('Tis told by good monks old)
The picture of a blessed saint
Fell on the pavement cold;
And where 'twas framed a window flamed
In amethyst and gold.

And through this window streamed the moon,
Resplendent as a queen,
Together with a glorious star,
The flitting clouds between,
And lit the aisle with mingled rays
Of gold and purple sheen.

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The simple chapel, in that light,
So strange and holy seemed
That when the pale nun paced the aisle
She surely thought she dreamed:
She thought a band of angels stood
Where the golden splendour streamed.

At length she knelt before the cross,
(A holy place to kneel)
And as she gazed in silent thought,
And prayed for sinners' weal,
A vision of the unseen world,
Blest spirits, seeming real,

Swept in a maze before her gaze,
And Jesus Christ was there.
And while she knelt, in wonder wrapt,
The vision, strangely fair,
In silence passed; but at the last
A cold mist filled the air.

Nor did it seem to be a dream;
She heard the shrill winds blow;
They, as they blew, around her drew
From wintry fields of snow;
Forming, she wist, a shape of mist,—
Our dreaded mortal foe.

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For as the cold winds gathered form
That shape obscured her gaze,
Till even the altar and the cross
Were vague as twilight haze:
And all so cold her chilled heart told
'Twas he who ends our days.—

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* * * * *
* * * * *

But here a page, yellow with age,
So many, many years,
Was faded so we could not know
The story of her fears;
But o'er the leaf we might discern,
Though dimmed, perchance with tears,

That Jesus, Lord, (she loved so well,
To whom she ever prayed)
In that sad hour was always there,
For pity of the maid:
And when the darkness gathered round
He said, "Be not afraid."

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THE CONVENT LEGEND

'Twas twelve o'clock, the convent bells
For Midnight Mass were ringing,
And all the nuns stood in the hall
A Christmas anthem singing,
And back and forth a novice turned,
The golden censer swinging.

And when the Abbess raised the cross
They marched out side by side:
Fair soldiers in a dream they seemed,
So softly did they glide
Across the yard and through the door
That still was open wide.

They saw the golden light that shone
Where hung the saint before,
And near the altar lay the nun,
Pale as the marble floor;
So pure and white, a holy sight
To bless and wonder o'er.

Her right hand crossed above the left,
A crucifix did hold;
Around her brows a halo wreathed
A crown of living gold;—
(Which some have thought
the moonlight wrought,—
The nuns have never told).

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And all the sad nuns gathered round
The form they loved so well,
While mournful strains from unseen choirs
Softly rose and fell;
The saddest dirge that e'er was sung
To bid a soul farewell.

The grieving Abbess sadly said,
"Our sister Beatrice
Stands in the presence of her Lord,
Where tears and sorrow cease;
And let us pray, this Christmas day,
To Him who giveth peace."

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THE VALLEY MYSTERIOUS

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THE VALLEY MYSTERIOUS

In a valley called Mysterious,
    There two winding rivers flow:
One with current, dark and serious,
    Moves methodically slow;
But the other flashing brightly,
    Seems to run,
Leaping lightly laughing sprightly,
    To the sun.

In the morning when the glowing
    Sun awakes the radiant sky,
You can see that river flowing,
    Swiftly by. —
If you wander or you linger
    On its margin — anywhere —
You will see a ghostly finger
    Moving upward through the air.

And that river from the valley,
    From your feet where you may stand,
Will appear to leap and sally
    From the land;
Will appear to rise to heaven,
    To the sun that brings the day,
As a ghostly power is given
    By the hand that points the way.

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As it leaps and whirls and dashes
Through the valley to your feet,
Fragrant odours where it splashes, —
Swooning sweet, —
Float with sounds that musically
Quiver — shiver — everywhere; — —
But above the lovely valley,
Where the river floats in air

From the spot your feet may stand on,
Whence it rises to the sun,
Every sense of earth abandon —
Every one; —
For the sweetest and the rarest
Things of earth,
And the dearest and the fairest
Seem to be of little worth. — —

* * * * *
* * * *

But the river dark and serious,
Oh beware!
In that valley, called Mysterious, — —
Falsely fair, —
It is winding smooth and slowly
To the west,
Where the sun has settled lowly —
Into rest.

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THE LAST OF LOST EDEN

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THE LAST OF LOST EDEN

It is recorded in the Talmud, that Adam had a wife before Eve, whose name was Lilis — or Lilith. She refused to submit to Adam, and, being supplanted by Eve, became a spectre.

And there is a tradition, that when Jehovah forbade Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden, He told them it should be unknown and lost to man through many ages, until The Millennium, and then returned to their race unchanged. Immediately, after their sad departure, it was hidden south of the Kaspian Sea, in the mysterious Mountains of Kaf, where neither Death may change its beauty nor Life nor Motion, until the day of its return to their redeemed children.

And in this hidden garden, this mysterious Paradise, Lilith must abide, where all is life, yet silent, immovable, unchangeable as death; and she must guard and watch that no motion nor growth, nor decay, may mar its beauty or change it, until returned to the children of Adam — exactly as he left it when he fled from the anger of Jehovah.

1

Oh, what is the reason God willeth
That nothing shall ever dissever
The last of lost Eden from Lilith —
Lost Eden surrounded,
Secreted and bounded
By river and mountain and sea?

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2

A secret, unspeakable terror
Broods over that beautiful glen;
Long hidden and silent, — but fairer
Than garlands in gardens of men. —
Oh never, oh never again,
The billing of doves in the trees! —
The thrilling of birds in the thickets,
The shrilling of summer-glad crickets,
The humming of diligent bees!

3

The lily-sweet atmosphere — haunting —
Where motion is none to be seen!
The blossomy branches enchaunting,
That ever loll over the green, — —
Bedabbled in water where ripples
Unmoving for ages have been! — —
And petals the sun never stipples,
Redoubled in velvety sheen
Of glassy deep pools, where the pale dawn
Has lingered since long the sun failed on
His journey through violet skies; —
Through skies of the lost Paradise; —
Where never again the moon dips
Away from the shadow-sea, sailed on,
Down, down as the dark night slips!

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Where winter winds never have wailed on
Their chilling wings willing for killing! —
    Where blossoms the cold never strips,
    Refreshed in the dew that not drips,
On leaning light stems are not paled on
    The water no thirsty bird sips.

4

What is it — a sin, a sad error
That lurks as a spirit of evil,
That haunts as a feeling of terror,
In silent, hushed vistas, primeval,
    Untouched by the folly of man? —
    What is it, a curse, a witch-ban —
A sinuous monster in there pent,
    Pervading the sinister air —
The breath of a dragon, a serpent,
    That fetters the life that is there?

5

Oh, call her not, name her not human, —
    Supreme where the motionless lives! — —
Alone, the frail shape of a woman
    That mystical, silent land gives
A shadow of human dominion! —
    For never a beast in a den,
    Nor even a newt in a fen;

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For never a spirit nor pinion,
Nor leaf from the motionless trees
Can quiver or shiver the river,
Can wake up or shake up the breeze!

6

The shadowy shadow of Lilith,
That lonely lost creature must be,
In the last of lost Eden, God willeth,
Surrounded by mountain and sea; —
Shut in from the wailing and sorrow,
That surges around her forever! —
Where never a mortal can sever
The last of the past from the morrow.

7

Oh, that is the reason, God willeth,
That nothing shall ever dissever
The last of lost Eden from Lilith —
Lost Eden — — surrounded, and bounded
By river and mountain and sea.

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SINNERS ALL—

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SINNERS ALL—

"Safe in the blessing of the Pope I went
With God's crusaders to the Holy Wars;
But there a javelin from a battlement
Transfixed my heart, and I was left a corse.

"As silent as the light from the dead moon
A shapeless ghost I left my worthless clay,
And ever since have wandered, night and noon,
Tossed by the winds as clouds are blown away.

"They swore by blood of Jesus, all the slain
Should join the saints in joys of Paradise;
Their solemn vows were sworn and given in vain,
For only as a ghost I breathe in sighs."—

Sadly the ghost of that crusader old
Made his lament, while all his spectral friends
Sighed in the wind, — so in the winter cold
Laments the night while chill the moon ascends.

When all was still, another ghost began
To whisper slowly with an accent weird; —
He told his version of the faith of man
Whose temples in his idle dreams are reared.

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"When the hot sun uprose in tropic wrath,
I traveled from a land of desert heat
To Mecca's blistered plains; along the path
So often trod by holy pilgrims' feet.

"Merciful Allah! in thy name I prayed,
And every day the Caaba-stone I kissed;
All the Koran to me a dervish read,
Expounding every meaning that he wist.

"I gave large treasure to the sanctified,
Who cried my bounty on the public road; —
They promised me rich blessings when I died,
In gardens of felicitous abode.

"Within the sacred Caaba Square, at last
My life was stricken by the deadly plague;
And there I died with eyes to Allah cast,
Assured of joys that now seem dark and vague.

"How many sapless years have rustled by
As leaves that flutter on December's breeze,
Since I, — poor ghost — have wandered aimlessly,
From Mecca's grave to shores of distant seas."

His tale is told, and now another saint
Begins to tell his woe — as when afar
Is heard the owl's last melancholy plaint,
Against the dawn that dims the dipping star.

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"With children in their arms the faithful came, —
A multitude, — to ask of me the path
That leads to holiness; — they said my name
Exorcised evil, and from Siva's wrath:

"For all things I had suffered, and was free
To holy meditation in the state
Of self-denial; — and it seemed to me
That Time stood still and Death had lost his date.

"But Age with bony finger touched my brow,
And all my followers, as the end drew near,
Went with me down the Ganges, from Lucknow
To far Benares' gates. — — 'O city dear,

" 'O Siva's heart:' so all began to chaunt, —
'O blest Benares, happy are thy dead!'
And as they sang they bathed me in that fount,
And purified me: and from thence they led

"Me joyous — or they bore me — all the way
In triumph — to the Golden Temple's Gate;
Where deep in meditation I could pray
For joys threefold that Brahma's love await.

"From thence to Doorgha Kond,— by christians called
The Temple of Devoted Monkeys; — these,
Most happy in that pious precinct walled,
Attend our God in sacred mysteries.

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"And we had scarcely entered when I fell,
Outworn with palsied age, on the hard floor;
And as I prayed I heard an inward knell
That warns the heart its tide of life is o'er.

"They said my soul descended far in space,
Where Sûrya reigns in broad effulgent gold;
They said I mingled with eternal grace,
In the pure essence of our God, threefold.

"But while they chaunted thus my mortal urn
Down the wide Ganges' wave was washed away;
And only as a ghost can I return
To that weird temple where the monkeys play."

In murmurs like the sound of dying winds,
The Brahmin's tale is told; and as the sound
Dies in the night, another spirit finds
An audience of the ghosts encircled round: —

"Called Timour Lenk, because my foot was lame,
My quest for blood and pillage never tired:
Behold that chief of Samarcand, whose name
The kings of all the world with fear inspired!

"How many thousand victims I impaled;
How many slaughtered with my scimitars;
How many widows their lost lords bewailed;
How many mothers cursed my dreadful wars!

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SINNERS ALL—

"Carnage and rapine were my greatest pleasures;
Blood was more welcome to my sight than gold;
The hour I looted Delhi of its treasures
In throes of death a hundred thousand rolled.

"The Brahmin priesthood cursed my life and death;
The Roman Pontiff banned me to unrest; —
Yet here I've wandered as the winter's breath,
No sadder than the saints whom they have blest."

So the bad ghost of Timour Lenk proclaimed
The weak futility of church and saint;
And as he finished many more exclaimed
Strong approbation in weird accents faint.

And all the while this offspring of the tomb
Thus whispered, they were 'neath Saint Peter's
Dome,
Where Pope and Cardinals in that sacred room,
Conferred for glory and success of Rome.

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

An Elegy.

Eurydice, the daughter of Nereus, was the beloved and virtuous wife of Orpheus, the melodious God of Music; but at the termination of the Golden Age, sin wrought for evil, and Eurydice, while flying from the wicked Aristæus was bitten on the heel by a serpent and died from the venom. Orpheus descended to the Regions of Death and besought Pluto for her return to life. His prayer was granted under condition he should not look back while bearing her from the abode of gloom. For love of her he turned to gaze upon her beautiful countenance, and she vanished; and he hath ever since wandered upon the face of the earth.

Dreaming upon a bed of fragrant flowers,
    Reclined a maiden in the pleasant noon,
As if to pass away the drowsy hours
    In thoughtless memories and wakeful swoon.

Afar she heard the sound of tinkling rills,
    The ever-singing birds, that must rejoice
In life, and far away among the hills
    The faintest echoes of an unknown voice.

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She listened to the softly swelling strains
Of liquid notes that ever nearer drew;
Delightful rhapsodies that o'er the plains
Were wafted by each friendly breeze that blew.

But still she lay upon her lovely bed,
While her bright fancies as the fays and elves,
Built palaces of moonstone, diamonded,
Gleaming as caves the astonished miner delves.

And ever as she dreamed those phantasies,
She strained to catch the accent of each word,
Wafted in song upon the gentle brceze,
Which, faintly first, at length she plainly heard:

"Fair blow the lilies,
in a bending spray,
Sprinkling musk dew-drops
on the honied bee; —
Sweeter my dear love,
oh, sweeter than they,
Love in thy fond eyes,
dear Eurydice."

Vanished the dream, the song has ceased; and now
A sigh escapes her rich half-parted lips;
And sorrow almost marks her smooth white brow
As from her mind the cherished vision slips.

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

The song is hushed; her faery dream is gone;
She turns and opens her dream-startled eyes; —
And Orpheus, King of Music, all alone,
Leans o'er her as his song in murmur dies.

As dew in lily chalice, into her dream
He melts. And ah! what hopes and vows have they
Mid sighs to tell; while far the red sun's beam
Glints the deep sky with slant and gilded ray.

Delightful moments! happy hours! ah fold
Thy tireless pinions lone and loveless Time!
Let not the twilight of this day grow old,
This day when love makes bright the world's fair prime.

The day is gone and night succeedeth night,
And they are all unconscious of the hours;
So happy their felicitous delight,
So sweet to pluck love's constant springing flowers.

And ah, to roam together that fair land,
While Orpheus breathes on his unequal reeds,
Or chaunts a rondo by some moon-lit strand,
Love-taught, heart-sweet, and that his dear love needs.

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Thus when the virgin earth was beautiful,
These lovers in that world of Paradise,
That region lovelier than the Land of Gul,
So fondly loved beneath the starry skies.

'Twas in the Golden Age, and all the earth
Was joyous, — beautiful with hope and truth;
The verdant valleys knew nor flood nor dearth,
And Time, that now is old, was in his youth.

The earth was radiant in that glorious prime;
The moon, the stars shone brighter in the stream:
The Golden Age — alas, that hallowed time
Has passed away as some melodious dream.

And where are they? ah, let the fountains tell
Where they have wandered since that peaceful age;
Or ask the winds, or hearken to the shell
That murmurs when old Nereus calms his rage.

Or ask thy soul and know the mournful truth,
Sadly she perished with the sin of man:
A lovely flower she blossomed in her youth
To fade away when sorrow's reign began.

'Tis ever thus the beautiful is marred —
Sorrow from joy; trouble from gentle sleep!
Over the wide sky, bright with glory, starred,
The ravening clouds rush upward from the deep.

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

What star-eyed Lily ever routed Night,
Or stole a tick of time from Nature's sheaf?
What valiant Rosebud ever vanquished Blight,
Or crushed the canker from its crumpled leaf? —

While Orpheus piped upon his oaten reeds
Sweet ditties tuneful birds might imitate,
Eurydice, providing simple needs,
Hunted wild honey and fruits delicate.

Lo! Aristæus, hidden in the brush,
Beheld her beauty as she chanced to pass,
And, rising to her view, with brutal rush
Ran lustful after. Through the yielding grass

She fled in terror, backward to the place
Where Orpheus waited in their wonted nook;
Fear urged her that she should have won the race,
But, hissing in her path, a serpent struck

Deep in her tender heel his venomed fangs. —
Alas, first victim of the serpent's rage,
Martyr of Sin and sad Death's bitter pangs,
Her beauty weltered with the Golden Age.

Since then the sad world knoweth not her reign,
And what is deemed most exquisite is marred;
The serpent's trail has left a taint, a stain, —
And all the face of earth is seared and scarred. —

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

Far through the night to Pluto's gloomy halls,
Grim-shadowed, labyrinthed in noxious haze,
Her stricken spirit as a lily falls,
Deprived of Orpheus' last love-lingering gaze.

Wafted by Charon over Stygian tide,
Her radiant beauty veiled in hideous glooms,
She, lost to love and light must there abide,
A tender lamb devoured by night-wolf dooms.

Far from the hallowed sphere of life and light,
Where, innocent, she roamed flower-spangled vales,
Now deeply prisoned in unpiteous night
She wanders barrens parched with torrid gales.

Alas, while her sad shadow flits below,
Glad Orpheus pipeth ditties on his reeds,
As long his custom when his love would go
To gather dainties for their daily needs.

But when the hour for her return was sped,
And he beheld the sun's declining rays,
Deprived of her sweet presence; lo! instead
Of her dear self a vision in a haze,

Obscure and ghastly, gathered in that bower;
And filled with horror he beheld her form, —
(Imaged in pale mist like a snow-white flower)
Languished to death by fangs of jealous worm.

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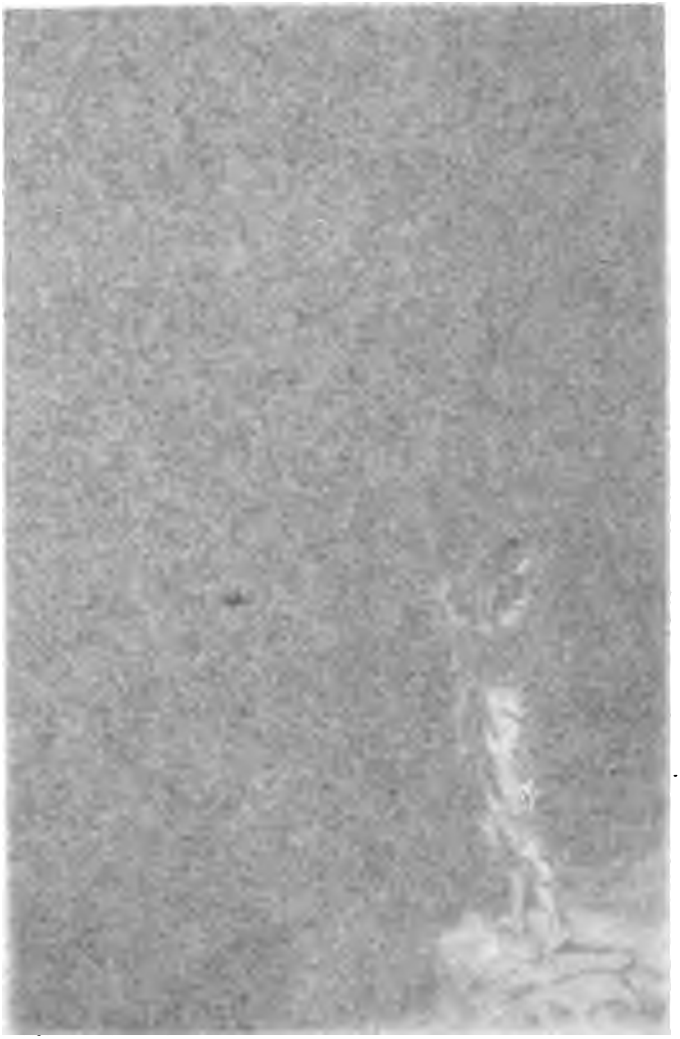

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Startled from musing rhapsodies he rose
To seek his love through wilds and hidden glens;
But still that vision guides him as he goes,
Fearful in haste, through labyrinthic dens.

Almost the moon hath flushed the silvered east,
Almost the sun hath burnished the gold west,
When gathering in a circle that gray mist
Hovers above his lone and lovely quest.

And when he views that child of beauty spent,
With no sweet spirit in her lifeless clay,
His grief confounding him, with wild lament
He halts the night and holds the flight of day: —

"Spread wide your portals, O disastrous Death!
Immortal I am coming to abide
Forever with your victims, void of breath,
Or ravish your dominion of my bride.

"Give up your denizens of midnight woe,
Immured in Misery's discordant wrong!
From light eternal to the gloom below
I challenge Discord with harmonic song."

Majestic with the power that music gives,
His challenge rings upon the gates of death;
Swart Death a moment harbours him who lives,
Breathing his woe to those who have not breath. —

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

"O Pluto, Lord of Shadows and Lost Souls!
What glory is it for these wretched wells,
Deep in the void whence Night her chariot rolls,
To 'mure the light of sweet Arcadian dells?

"Is this the dark fate virtue may expect,
The pure destroyed to ease the spleen of Sin;
What final good can evil deed effect;
Must virtue lose that wickedness may win?

"O Pluto, Lord of human destiny,
What deed of lustful sin must this requite,
To blot my beautiful Eurydice,
Star of my life, in this opaquous night?

"Release that Child of Beauty, O grim Death!
Life, light and love should never gild a tomb;
Her place is where the pure breeze wandereth,
Loving the rose to lovelier blush and bloom.

"Strong in the frailty of harmonic laws,
I come to quell the wrath of death and strife;
My love release! — love's pure and primal cause, —
That I may bear her to the land of life."

So sings he God-like to his tuneful lyre,
While stops the torture of Ixion's wheel,
While Tantalus forgets tormenting fire,
And the fierce Furies piteous languor feel.

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And all the clangour of wide Hades hushed,
The sad-eyed shadows flutter as the leaves
When wreathed Spring, with tender buds new-flushed,
In floating green the amorous Wind receives.

And in an ecstacy of quivering sighs
Dark dungeons tremble, stricken with delight;
The rock-ribbed pit that death and time defies
Glows with a joy too luminous for night.

The deep foundations of that vale of woe
Sway to the rhythm of one soul's complaint;
Grim Pluto shudders lest that mortal foe
May shatter his strict portals of restraint.

Hatred destroyed lies vanquished by pure love;
Discord disabled, harmony has quelled;
Pluto in panic, dazzled from above,
Seeks to restore sweet life, obdurate held.

Wrung from his might that Lord of Woe replied,
"Brief is the boon of blessed life above,
No mortal may recross the Stygian tide,
But this I grant to thee and to thy love;

"Return with her in thy protecting arms,
And rise together to the sun-lit skies;
But if thy glance should turn to view her charms,
Again to death she'll vanish from thine eyes."

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Alas, the sentence that should give them fear
Fills them with courage, joy, and blessed hope;
Wreathing in ready arms that burden dear
Orpheus ascendeth to the sun-lit cope.

While they are rising from that haunt of gloom,
She sighs his name in tones of former days,
Which when he hears, forgetting her sad doom,
He turns to worship her with lover's gaze.

Oh, sad conclusion of undaunted quest,
His lovely mate restored by Pluto's grant,
Only because his love confused his breast
Again destroyed that shadow-realm must haunt.

No more for him the adamantine gate
Swings inward to that region of bleak woe;
No more for her, twice-dead of jealous fate,
That silent valve gives exit from below.

Never again can Orpheus thread the gloom,
And wake those hollows with his raptured notes;
To wander on the earth is now his doom,
Love-lorn in valleys where the ring-dove dotes.

The wearied centuries have withered away
The essence of his youth and left him old —
He seems a shadow in the noon of day,
A wraith of pale mist when the moon is cold.

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Weary of heart the Golden Age he mourns,
In winter winds attuned to minor keys;
And when the gladdened earth warm spring adorns
The birds rehearse his plaintive melodies. —

And who is he whose song is sad and sweet?
And who is he that sings a mournful song?
And who is he with slow but viewless feet,
That treads the swaying asphodels among?

It is a spirit that pervades the wild,
The singing birds that gives to life and breath;
The King of Music, weeping that sweet child, —
Eurydice, alas, destroyed by death. —

A plaintive song doth he to Nature tell;
And thou mayst hear it by the far sea-shore;
And thou mayst hear it in the leafy dell,
By wind and wave repeated o'er and o'er.

For every gale that wafts from lonely isle,
Loves to repeat the sad and plaintive notes;
And thou mayst hear it, if thou wilt, the while
This monody upon the still night floats: —

"I'll hang my harp upon the willows high,
The willows in a silent wilderness,
Where every sweetest breeze that sweepeth by,
May touch it softly with a fond caress.

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"Where every careless wind from grove and wild,
May wake to life Love's song, seraphic, lost
When my love died; ah, fair and lovely child,
Too frail to live in vessel tempest-tossed.

"How fond I loved her when the earth was new!
Before the day when Slaughter marked his own,
When all the universe was pure and true,
When only life and love and hope were known! —

"Alas, a discord jangles now the string,
A fatal palsey quavers now the note;
Fain would I life forego and mount on wing
To the stars, bland, sweet-hymning as they float."

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THE LAND OF LIGHT

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THE LAND OF LIGHT

Al Araf to Alicon.

Seventy stanzas are in the narrative; and there is a mystery of perfection contained in the number seventy, it being ten times the perfect seven. And the seventy stanzas are each of three lines, — a mystical cabala that emanates from the throne of Allah; for, always will the Two Prophets stand at the right and left of the One Omnipotent, — three wills made manifest in one.

Behold, the sacred words that descended from the Seventh Heaven, as gentle as the dews of Mecca, are the history of a certain wise and mighty Chaldean, who crossed over the dismal abyss of unsaved spirits, which are neither condemned to the perdition of Gehenna nor saved to the joys of Heaven. — Christians may call a like place "Limbo," but the true believer calleth it Al Araf.

And before that Chaldean Magian crossed over the dark chasm on the glorious Al-Sirat, mysterious bridge whose span is as a sword's edge, and over which our souls must pass before they may attain the abode of

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departed spirits, which have been received in Islam; the angel Azrael, the frightful cause of death, dissolved the Magian's mortal essence, so that his spirit might move in a radiant region of the stars that, like a foot-stool to Allah Akbar, revolves below the splendour of Alicon.

Doth not the Holy Scroll aver; from Alicon, which is the Seventh Heaven (whence the living God looks down to earth), streams more golden than the River Altan Kol proceed? Al Koran, doth it not declare, "Rivers shall run at their feet."

And in that region the sacred wandering spirit, of that wise and rescued Chaldean, saw tinted lights, in which a holy Dervish may discover hidden meanings.

O sacred words! and they were chaunted by the Blessed Angel, Israfil — whose heart is like the lute — and, with many others, beautiful, are woven in a song of truth and hope and light.

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THE LAND OF LIGHT

Over a wide and sullen stream,
Like the weird fancy of a dream,
Behold Al-Sirat's radiant gleam:

Al-Sirat, bridge of brightest glow,
Rising above the turbid flow
Of that mysterious stream below.

Curved as a jewelled scimitar,
Bright as the shaft of Isfendiar,
Its light pierced through the distance far.

I blest its genial beauty there,
For the bleak night was dark; and where
I stood was cold, and chill the air;

And vapours hovered on the tide,
And the dark current spread so wide
That none might see the other side.

But I conceived vales of delight,
Spreading beyond the gloomy night,
Led from that glowing rainbow bright.

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And, in that phantasy of thought,
Hope a delusive splendour wrought,
And momentary comfort brought.

But I was on a treacherous ooze,
Al Araf's margin, dank with dews,—
A sadder place heart could not choose.

The bridge, though beautiful, seemed frail,
And I was sure its arch would fail
To bear me from that dismal vale.

No shallop light to save was there,
Nor any craft, with white sails fair,
To stem the tide on wings of air.

Fantastic phantoms would appear,
Which, though intangible, seemed near,
And filled me with a nameless fear:

Fear of disaster, a strange dread
That I might join the formless dead,
And haunt the void that round me spread.

Fearing such deep and desolate
Abyss as my unhallowed fate,
Backward I turned disconsolate.

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Thus, turning, I beheld on high
A pale white phantom in the sky,
That like a cloud sailed silently.

This way and that it sailed and whirled,
But never a filmy edge unfurled,
Nor was it lustrous, dew impearled.

It ever seemed a cloud, although
It left the sky with motion slow
Until it touched the vale below:

A phantom of unearthly white,
A nebula of rayless light,
Formless and blending in the night.

The frost of Azrael was beneath
Its silent wing, and its sharp breath
Was the black frost of utter death.

My very veins with ice were filled,
The well-spring of my life was chilled,
The beating of my heart was stilled

As doomed eternal, flesh and soul; —
Congealed as streams that never roll
From ice-chains of the nether Pole:

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THE BEGGAR'S VISION

Not dead and not alive, I seemed
A statue in a nightmare dreamed,
A haunted void — fronting where gleamed

An arch of hope, resplendent thrown
From sad Al Araf (antres lone)
To dim shores of the vast unknown. —

So light spreads forth from the black sky;
So life is born from those that die;
And so from utmost alchemy

I felt anew sweet life pervade;
And the dark past began to fade —
(But still that arch and sad stream staid).—

Lightly I moved, as in a dream,
Across that wide and gloomy stream,
Over that bridge of rainbow-gleam;

And soon upon the center stood
Of that great arch; and lo, the flood
Rolled red and sanguine — red as blood.

The light that made the bridge so sheen
Flashed on the river's depth, obscene,
Fantastic flames of gold and green;

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Fort Wayne on Maumee River

A Stream of Indian Corn

And those strange lights, that mixed and blent,
All flashing a wild splendour lent
The sanguine tide which onward went.

And I observed its winding chasm
Flowed fast with many a weird phantasm,
Writhing in pain and tortuous spasm.

Like seething waves the sad shapes heaved;
Alas, it was, as I believed,
A stream of bodies interweaved.

But oh, to see that lovely light,
From the high arch, gleam far and bright,
On upturned faces woful white!

And far away their tremulous sighs
Like mist above the waves would rise,
Slow-wafting to the leaden skies.

And from the deep waves many a groan,
Like sorrowing ghost from mortal flown,
Took shape and floated, sad and lone.

What wonder that I swiftly sped
Over that bridge — a rainbow spread
Across that River of the Dead —

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Whilst all those ghostly sights, that made
My blood to chill, no longer staid
But in the distance soft did fade.

Thus, having left the Vale Despair,
With glad surprise, a region fair
I viewed with rapture. Wheresoe'er

My wildered steps were turned, it seemed
That I was in a region dreamed
With phantasies that round me streamed;

And all the woful sights that made
My blood so chill, and even staid
My pulse-beat, far away did fade:

For I had left the dismal tide,
And now was in a region wide
And radiant — where wonders vied

With every beauty to display
Sights more delightful. And alway
The breezes whispered, as in May.

And where I wandered in that land
A river followed; and its strand
Was beautiful, of lucent sand,

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As the bright waves of Altan Kol,
That over Asian ledges roll,
Speckled with gold from sandy shoal;

Glancing through meadow, field and wold,
Argentine, lined with yellow gold,
Edged with green banks and forests old.

And there were places where the trees,
Close by the brink, caught every breeze,
Or lapped the wave their thirst to appease;

And blue as Persian skies in May,
When rain has left a cloudless day,
Exotic champaks starred the way;

And everywhere the Sakhrat-sheen,
From skies to waters hyaline,
Dissolved in beauty o'er the scene.

Oh, it was beautiful to look
Upon — with many a shaded nook,
Where all around sweet light-beams strook.

Night came not there with deadly hush,
Nor chilling frost, nor loud wind's rush
The tender buds to beat and crush;

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For there were two bright suns that shone
Together, and were never lone;
And the bleak night was all unknown.

One sun was purest blue and ne'er
Beamed in mid-sky, but circled where
The far tree-tops dissolved in air:

The other sailed with wondrous motion,
Backwards and forth across the ocean
Of lambent air, that no commotion

Or tempest ever tossed. Pure white
It shone, with large and steady light,
In skies that knew nor storm nor night.

And when their beams did intersect,
The lovely meads, so sweet bedecked,
With strangest lights and shades were checked.

Shadows that swerved from side to side,
To follow those twin suns, did glide
With motion slow across the wide

Translucent and deep-glowing sky —
And aye the shadows, silently
As winged Tacwins, flitted by.

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The trees seemed ever budding with
New life, and every field and heath
Was glowing in life's generous breath.

To breathe the air gave hope and joy;
And there was nothing to annoy
Or grieve the heart, and naught to cloy.

And I could see no yellow leaves,
Nor branches bare, nor withered sheaves,
Nor sign of death that earth bereaves:

It was so different from aught
Of earth, or anything that thought
Could picture, or that dreams have wrought.

The concave golden sky was spread
With stars and meteors that shed
Soft beams of white and blue o'erhead.

These lights were wonderful and fair,
Most pleasant to the eye, and ne'er
Beamed like the noonday's blinding glare.

As lovely spirits in the sky,
Or splendid birds, they seemed to fly
Across the glowing dome on high.

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And every star sent forth a clear
And perfect note, which to the ear
Was rapturous as a ringing sphere;

Or like the blessed angel's voice,
Bidding the heavenly choirs rejoice
In Him who is their love and choice, —

The blessed angel, Israfil,
On Alicon's engolden'd hill,
Heard by the saints when night is still —

Ten thousand, thousand joyous notes,
Sweet as when through the forest floats
The silvery joys of feathered throats.

And those two suns, one blue, one white,
Seemed monarchs of that land of light,
For all the stars paled in their might;

And even I, in that sweet hour,
Acknowledged their most gentle power,
As did the blue and white star-shower.

And here am I, where Truth and Hope,
Benignant, beam from starry cope,
In knowledge sure Death's portals ope

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THE LAND OF LIGHT

To larger life, and not to sleep,
Amid world-stars that vigils keep
O'er sorrowing men who toil and weep.

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